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ABSTRACT

The paper describes the practicum requirements of the Special Education Teacher Preparation program at California State University at Northridge, and it notes problem areas in the roles of the principal, cooperating teacher, and the university professor. Field work requirements involving observation, participation, and student teaching at both the generic and specialization levels are detailed. (DB)

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PROBLEM AREAS IN STUDENT TEACHING
AND THE
CALIFORNIA SCENE

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California State University, Northridge, has developed an advanced post-baccalaureate program in special education. The paper presented at the 1980 CEC Convention includes a description of the special education teacher preparation program.

The program's requirements, components and delicate problems are discussed from the viewpoint of the University supervisor.

PROBLEM AREAS IN STUDENT TEACHING
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This paper will discuss the California State University, Northridge, requirements in the Special Education Teacher Preparation program and some of the problems student teaching coordinators experience.

Individuals who wish to teach Special Education in California are required to have a Bachelor's Degree, a basic teaching credential and a Special Education credential. The rationale is that by having a broad background the individual will be optimally prepared to work with children who have special needs.

In order to obtain the Special Education credential it is necessary to complete 24 units beyond the basic teaching credential and student teach in a specialized area. The choices of specialization are: 1) Communication handicapped, 2) Learning handicapped, 3) Severely handicapped, 4) Gifted, and 5) Physically handicapped.

Course work leading to a specialist credential is divided into two levels: a) Generic, which includes course and experiences across the entire field and b) Specialization, which includes courses and experiences directly related to the desired area of study.

Fieldwork leading to the specialist credential is divided into the generic level which requires 120 hours of observation and participation with children of every exceptionality served by Special Education programs, and the specialization level which

requires a minimum of 60 hours of participation as an Instructional Aide with children at the primary, intermediate, junior and senior high levels. The specialist credential enables a student to teach kindergarten through twelfth grade.

Each candidate has an initial interview before she is admitted to the program. This insures all requirements are met. Once approved, the student selects an advisor from the department to help plan her educational program. Since the program is based on individualized competency, if the student can provide verification of successful past fieldwork, specific hours may be waived.

Occasionally, a student's attitude, sensitivity or class performance makes it extremely doubtful she will be a successful candidate. If a question is raised by a member of the faculty, the student is called back for a second interview by a committee which includes members of the department, a school district representative and a faculty member from another department. The interview will attempt to show the student the depths of the problems and bring forth suggestions for solving them. In an extreme case, there may be a suggestion the student study in an area other than Special Education.

After a student meets the requirements for student teaching, her placement is discussed with her student teaching supervisor. They will review the student's area of specialization, grade and class preference, teaching style, and geographic location. This discussion is extremely important because few students fully understand what

student teaching entails. As an example of this I present the following note which I received from a student teacher at the completion of her assignment:

"Dear Dr. Forer,

"Your never told me it was going to be like this. . . that I would lose almost 10 pounds. . . that I would dream about the students on my vacation. . . that I would be 'stickered out' . . . that I would fall asleep sitting in a chair. . . that I would have to reintroduce myself to my family and friends. . . that I could spend so much time with school work and love/hate it. . . that I would experience wonderful and horrible feelings and everything within the course of a typical day. . . that nothing is typical. . . and that rainy days, windy days, sunny days and school days in general would be an off day for kids."

Student teaching placements are made through consultation with school district coordinators and a follow up visit to the classroom by the University supervisor and student. If feasible, arrangements are made well in advance so the student may spend "instructional aide" hours in the prospective class. This allows the student and the cooperating teacher to observe each other. If there appears to be a positive relationship between the student teacher and the cooperating teacher, the chances for success are enhanced.

Like everything else in life, student teaching has its own political agenda. There are many dichotomous roles which come into play in the "Student Teaching Game". The principal is one of the key players. She determines the atmosphere and acceptance of a special education program in a school.

In evaluating a principal and a school as a potential student teacher placement site, a University supervisor must determine if:

- a) The administration is knowledgeable in making appropriate decisions for developing optimal programs for the special education student, teacher and class. Specifically, is the program at the school an exemplary one with an atmosphere of sharing the "learning experience".
- b) The special education program is integrated with the rest of the school, or are the special education classes and activities isolated and away from the mainstream.
- c) The school accepts the special education program in a positive and sensitive manner. If so, does the atmosphere permeate the administration, faculty, aides, custodial staff and the other pupils.
- d) There is a genuine desire to cooperate with the university to build a beneficial program for all.
- e) The principal is a positive role model for student teachers.

Above all, a University supervisor must be watchful for principals who desire student teachers as "extra hands" to help talented, but overworked special education teachers or take over for incompetent cooperating teachers.

The choice of a cooperating teacher is of utmost importance. It has often been said, "Once you find a good one, never let her go." However, not letting go can pose a problem because working with a student teacher is exhausting. It takes time, dedication, energy and patience to do a quality job. Watching pupils struggle with an inexperienced student teacher can be frustrating. There is, however, an exhilarating sense of satisfaction when the student teacher matures and succeeds.

In order to avoid teacher burnout, the cooperating teachers should have student teachers for no more than six months per year. This is important because after a while many cooperative teachers miss having their classes to themselves.

Once the placement is made, the University supervisor and the student teacher meet with the cooperating teacher to review the Student Teaching Handbook. This manual suggests a weekly outline for the student teacher's development and delineates what is expected from each member of the team.

The only tangible benefits the cooperating teacher receives are University library and audio/visual privileges and remuneration in the sum of \$30 per semester. This is in no way indicative of the cooperating teacher's value. They are the key to the student teaching experience. They are responsible for helping the student integrate the theoretical and practical aspects of classroom teaching.

Fox believes student teaching goals should be set cooperatively by the University supervisor, cooperating teacher and student teacher. He suggests:

"The student teacher and cooperating teacher should teach cooperatively from the very first day that the student teacher is in the classroom. The student teacher and cooperating teacher should plan and share together so that the student is a part of the ongoing activity." (Johnson and Perry, 1967)

Because of the close relationships which develop between a student teacher, cooperating teacher and a class, it is sometimes difficult for a student teacher to leave at the end of a semester.

The student teacher must be careful not to allow the special child to view her departure as a negative experience. Rather, the student teacher must help the child recognize her self worth so she may go on and experience other positive relationships.

What role does the University professor play? If things are going well, the student teacher and the cooperating teacher need her for positive feedback. For some reason many cooperating teachers have difficulty complimenting their "proteges". Instead, they prefer to express their satisfaction through the University supervisor. When things are not going well, she is the objective third person, the neutral one. If there is a personality conflict, misunderstanding or unclear assignment, the University professor brings it to the surface. She is the idea person, the expert providing new approaches, sharing observations and solving classroom problems.

Harty and Ritz (1974) posited that the six most important components of their theory of supervision were:

- "(1) supervisor needs to establish a helping relationship,
- (2) supervisor must accept the personal beliefs of the student teacher as valid, (3) student teacher needs to recognize the supervisor as a helping individual, (4) supervisor's role is that of a non-evaluative data collector who provides the student teacher with observational data, (5) student teacher and supervisor need to develop a collaborative partnership, and (6) supervisor needs to be a 'real person'."

Occasionally the student teacher innocently involves herself in a power play between the cooperating teacher and the principal or between the cooperating teacher and another teacher. In these instances the University professor provides a support system for the student teacher. Harty and Ritz (1974) postulate that the:

"Effective supervisor engages collaboratively in the problem solving process by summarizing encouraging analysis and clarifying, but not by posing ready and 'pat' solutions."

Observing a student teacher in action requires the University professor to balance her time so she can visit student teachers at regular intervals and observe various phases of the teaching experience. It is inadequate for the University professor to observe the student teacher and the cooperating teacher without periodic conferences. The interchange and ongoing evaluation is the most important aspect of the University professor's role. Hunter (The Association for Student Teaching, 1969) comments that:

"One of the major purposes of student teaching meetings would seem to be that of helping students integrate their past learnings with their present experiences in order to improve their effectiveness in the classroom."

To accomplish this the University professor must be both tactful and sensitive. She must be a good listener so she can investigate the strengths and weaknesses of her student's work and organization. Conant (Tanruther, 1967) emphasized the necessity for the supervisor to have a background of experience in teaching at the level and in the subject fields for which supervision is provided, stating:

"The professor from the college or university who is to supervise and assess the practice teaching should have much practical experience. His status should be analogous to that of a clinical professor in certain medical schools."

Each individual has her own temperament and preferences. There are times when student teachers are discouraged because they are unable to experiment with their own ideas. They often need

reminding that when they have their "own" class, they will be able to do it their "own" way.

As the semester progresses the relationship between the student teacher and cooperating teacher usually becomes more secure. As it does, the student teacher should be given more leeway to experiment with her own ideas and teaching methods. Hopefully, they will be well received. According to Bebb (1969) improved teaching is more likely to occur when the student teacher senses genuine concern on the part of those trying to help her, when she is truly respected as an individual, and when his ideas and concerns are of importance to those working with him. When this occurs, the learning and evaluating which takes place is truly a fulfilling experience.

Past student teachers will understand the feelings of one of my student teachers who recently said, "Student teaching is like treading in your mother-in-law's kitchen". Student teachers are always agreeable. They smile a lot. They never complain. They are asked to perform for "all who enter the portals of the classroom," whether it be a parent, principal, visitor or University professor. It is never ending - performing and learning; learning and performing.

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